

MATTHEW 19

DIVORCE, CHILDREN, AND RICHES

We now read that our Savior departed from the region of Galilee, and traveled down to the parts of Judea that lay on the eastern banks of the Jordan River. There He continued to preach to and heal the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But alas! While Jesus was thus busily engaged in His labor of love, “the Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him” – desiring to find some fault that they might accuse Him of. With this intention firmly in view, they began to question Him on a matter that was hotly debated among themselves – namely, for what cause might a man be justified in divorcing his wife. But see how expertly the Lord Jesus answered them! He would not be drawn into any argument on the subject. Rather, He referred them to the institution of marriage, as it was set forth in the case of our first parents, at the beginning of the Book of Genesis. He pointed out how God had sanctioned marriage, by making only one man and one woman. He repeated the words that were said by Jehovah Himself, which Adam apparently repeated at God’s direction: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Hence it is clear that the new relationship that is entered upon by a man and his wife must be even more binding than the inseparable ties which connect the parent and the child. A son can no more cease to be his parent’s child than a husband can cease to be the spouse of his wife. And having pronounced a married couple to be “one flesh,” whom God has linked together, the Lord Jesus concluded that no man ought to dare to tear them asunder! Marriage is a blessed and enjoyable condition which – when it is properly entered into and carefully upheld – stands as a beautiful symbol of the mystical union that exists between Christ and His beloved Bride, the Church (Eph.5:23).

The Pharisees next asked, “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?” Here they had misinterpreted their Old Testament Scriptures, for Moses had not *commanded* any such thing; rather, as Jesus reminds them, he only *permitted* this course of action in a few particular cases (Deut. 24:1). And in the very same breath, He also makes it clear that this permission which the Law of Moses contained was nothing more than an indulgence to the hardness of the people’s hearts. And by Jesus’ time, this indulgence was something which the Jews, in practice, had very grossly abused!

Immediately after this conversation, even the disciples began to reason that “if the case of a man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry” – as if the

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The Savior answers the Pharisees’ question about divorce – verses 1-12
- ❖ Children are brought to Jesus so that they might be blessed by Him – verses 13-15
- ❖ Christ’s conversation with the rich young man – verses 16-22
- ❖ He speaks to His disciples about riches, as well as about the everlasting recompense that awaits His followers – verses 23-30

most endearing ties of love were worth so little, that they might be exchanged for any reason! In reply, Jesus stated that the unmarried life is not something that is for everyone. For a chosen few individuals, the blessing of marriage is not granted, in order that they might be more free for a special life-work that God has called them to. But Christ does not set these persons on a more honorable level than those who are married; rather, as is seen in verses 13 and 14, He places special emphasis upon the beauty of family life!



The disciples needed to be reminded once again of how beautiful the disposition of little children is in the sight of God, for they began to rebuke the parents who brought their little ones to receive a blessing from the gentle Shepherd. But Jesus tenderly commanded the little children to be brought near to Him; “for of such,” said He, “is the kingdom of heaven.” And then “he laid his hands on them” and blessed them. These words very forcibly teach us that it is a point of Christian duty to aid the helplessness of children, and to instruct them with patience and kindness and attention. But they chiefly serve to reinforce the doctrine which Jesus had already laid down in chapter 18 – namely, that we ourselves must possess a disposition that is like that of little children, if we wish to have our desires of entering into the Kingdom of heaven fulfilled. We are to imitate a little child’s sense of dependence and love toward their father and mother, and exercise the same toward our Father in heaven.

“And behold one came, and said unto him, Good Master what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” (verse 16) It seems that he hoped to be told of some particular thing to do – perhaps a repetition of a certain prayer, or a pilgrimage to a certain place, or a careful observation of a certain ceremony. In short, he wished to be told of one thing, by the doing of which he might be sure to go to heaven. The reply of our Savior shows us that it is not the doing of any one single thing; but rather, it is a disposition to do everything – especially that thing which is most hard to us – in a devout manner, and on a principle of Christian faith, that qualifies us for the Kingdom of heaven. This young man professed that he had kept all the commandments from his youth. However, he had yet to learn their full extent and perfection. He little dreamed that they implied the words which Christ next told him: “Go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” This one thing, he still lacked; for being unwilling to do this one thing, he did not love his neighbor as himself, nor did he love God with all his heart.

This led to what may seem to be a severe remark from Jesus: “a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven” (verse 23). Alas! How deceitful are riches! How easy it is for those who have them to trust in them, and to forget – in the vanity and selfishness of their hearts – the Almighty Giver!

O Lord Jesus, You are Your Church’s Bridegroom! Thank You for the assurance that You will never put her away from You, no matter what the world does! Amen.